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A NEW BOOK ON ALASKA *

Those who were familiar with General Greely's *Handbook of Polar Discoveries* were glad to hear that he had undertaken the present work, and indeed he has done another public service in writing this concise summary of information about a country that grows every year of more importance to the United States. There has been no lack of books about Alaska, but there has never before been written so comprehensive and authoritative a general statement of its geography, population, industries, commerce, and conditions of life. A great mass of facts and figures has been carefully collected and digested, and the results are readily set forth in brief chapters which in the main cover the ground adequately, and in tables which are of great use for ready reference; and the whole is illustrated by some twenty-five excellent photographs and by eight maps and charts.

As would be expected from the author's standing and service and previous publications, the book is written in a dispassionate way, neither with the depreciation from which Alaska used to suffer, nor with the extravagance in the other direction from which it bids fair to suffer now. As Chief of the Signal Corps of the United States Army, and again as general in command of the military department in which Alaska is situated, the author has made many visits to many parts of the country, and is perhaps as well qualified personally for the task he has set himself as another man who could have undertaken it.

It is said that there is no single cabman in London who knows the whole of that city. So it may certainly be said that there is no man living who knows the whole of Alaska. Perhaps Bishop Rowe knows more parts of it than any other man, but there are great regions in Alaska in which the Bishop has never set foot. Any Alaskan, therefore, who should undertake to review General Greely's book would be compelled to restrict his examination of it to that section of the country with which

* *Handbook of Alaska*. By Major-General A. W. Greely, U. S. A. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1909.

he is familiar, save for such general information as he may have touching the vast remainder. Alaska is not one country; it is four or five countries, remote and most difficult of access the one from the other. The present writer's acquaintance is with the Yukon watershed, in which he has lived and travelled extensively for the past five years, an area that constitutes perhaps two-fifths of Alaska. The book before us is a good, and in the main, very accurate representation of this enormous valley, its streams, its towns, its people, its industries, its resources.

It is not free from mistakes, as how should an undertaking of such a nature be? One curious mistake occurs in the general description of the Yukon River in the chapter on "Waterways, Roads and Railways," where the author says, "Flowing in its upper reaches through canyon-like valleys, it debouches shortly after entering Alaska into a plateau tundra region, where its wide and winding channels divide and flow *sluggishly*, especially in the great flats near Fort Yukon." It is strange how any man who has passed up and down the Yukon as many times as General Greely, should make such a mistake as that. Coming from canyon-like valleys into this great flat, a river would naturally change its current from a swift to a sluggish one, and the Yukon ought to do so, by all analogy. But it is one of the peculiarities of the Yukon that the opposite is the case. The current in the Flats is swifter than in any other part of the river. It takes a steamboat much longer to make the ninety or a hundred miles up stream from Fort Yukon to Circle City than any other hundred miles of its whole Alaskan course. The writer of this article has drifted down in an open boat between these points in sixteen hours, with no more rowing than was necessary to keep the boat in the channel, which will give a current of nearly six miles an hour, while the average current of the Yukon from Eagle to Tanana will not exceed four miles an hour.

The Porcupine, which is stated to be navigable for 100 miles for light draft boats, is certainly so navigable as far as the Rampart House, which is 200 miles from its mouth. It is odd that while the Porcupine, upon which no steamboats ply, is thus mentioned in discussing the tributaries of the Yukon, in this chapter, the far more important Koyukuk, navigable for up-

wards of 500 miles, with regular steamboat trips, is not mentioned at all. The chapter on waterways needs re-writing.

Rampart on the Yukon has nothing like 400 inhabitants, nor has had for years. A tenth of that number would be nearer the mark to-day. During the past summer the last saloon closed its doors,—and it is not necessary to say any more to a man who knows Alaska.

The statistics of population given on page 174 are irreconcilable with figures given on page 175, and the figures of the fur trade given in the text are totally different from similar figures given in the table of Alaskan products. When the figures of other imports are given so fully, it seems a little disingenuous to omit all the figures of the importation of liquor, and yet to notice with satisfaction that there has lately been a falling off of sixteen per cent. The actual figures of the importation of alcoholic liquors into Alaska would be very interesting; by common report this one item constitutes two-thirds of the whole value of all merchandise brought into the country by the two great companies themselves. There is an enormous per capitum consumption of alcoholic drinks in Alaska, larger, one is tempted to believe, than in any other country in the world.

There are other minor points to which criticism may be directed, some of which need only to be pointed out to be corrected in a subsequent edition. Thus Cleary Creek is said to be nine miles from Fairbanks. If the author had walked it as often as the present writer has done, he would know that it is much farther. It used to be called twenty-three; perhaps nine is a misprint for nineteen, and in the general scaling down of Alaskan distances which follows the construction of good trails, that may pass. Exception may be taken to the use of two names for the same place; Kobuk and Kowak, for instance, for the river which is known in Alaska as the Kobuk only; Kititak, on page 196, for Kikitaruk, as the map correctly gives it; Hosiana, in the text, page 25, for Hodana, correctly, on the map. In the text, Fort Yukon is stated positively to be in latitude 67 N., but in the accompanying map it is placed exactly on the Arctic Circle, which is the position which has always been accepted in Alaska;—a difference of twenty-eight geo-

graphic miles. In this connection the writer may perhaps be pardoned for expressing his gratification at finding incorporated for the first time in the excellent map which accompanies the volume, the many corrections in the names of Alaskan places which he has urged upon the National Board of Geographic Names.

But the reader who is interested in Alaskan missions will turn with greatest zest to see what the author has in the chapter devoted to "Education and Missions." General Greely's point of view is sympathetic and appreciative, and full justice is done to all the present agencies which are laboring for the uplift of the people, both whites and natives. The tone of General Greely's reference to the natives is always kindly and generous, and he realizes to the full the curse which contact with the white man has been to them, the shame of it. It is sometimes a little difficult to reconcile his strong statements to this effect, and his recognition of the unquestionable truth that the complete success of any missionary work amongst the natives depends upon their segregation from the whites, with the unfailing good character he gives to the white men of the country whenever he has opportunity to mention them. When, however, General Greely dates the beginning of Protestant missionary work in Alaska from the opening of the Presbyterian church in Wrangell in 1876, he ignores completely perhaps one of the most remarkable and persistent missionary efforts that was ever put forth in the face of immense difficulties and hardships, in the labors of the clergy of the English Church Missionary Society. Their work extended as far down the river as Tanana, and covered the Porcupine and the Chandalar Rivers, with visits to the Tanana River as far up as the Ketchumstock. The remarkable labors and extensive evangelizing journeys of Archdeacon Macdonald in particular, have never received the recognition they so richly deserve. He translated the whole Bible, the whole Book of Common Prayer, many hymns and other religious writings, into the native tongue, and to this day his translations are in use in all our missions from Fort Yukon up. In 1862 Archdeacon Macdonald had established a mission at Fort Yukon, and when Lieutenant Raymond came to

Fort Yukon in 1869 to determine whether the place was within the limits of the newly acquired territory, he reports finding the Rev. Mr. Bompas, a clergyman of the Church of England, afterwards Bishop Bompas, there. It cannot be too gladly and freely acknowledged that any solid foundation which our work may have was laid by these men. The fact that every native for a thousand miles along the Yukon River is at least nominally a member of our communion is due to them. Where so much praise is given, by no means undeservedly, to the early labors of the Greek Church, it is but right that these Anglican pioneers who approached the country, not by the easy gateway of the seacoast, but through the unknown and almost impenetrable wilderness between the lower Mackenzie and the Yukon, and lived and labored in this interior when it was quite untouched in its savage wilderness, should be remembered and commemorated. To the work of the American Episcopal Church the author gives full recognition, and all American churchmen will value his appreciative references to Bishop Rowe.

In so considerable a compilation as this, some errors and omissions were unavoidable, and attention has been drawn to them here that they may be set right in the second edition which will assuredly be called for. They are not numerous, and for the most part, not important, and detract but little from the value of the book. It puts into accessible form information that must have been hunted through hundreds of publications without it. The book is conservative,—in the modern slang sense of that word. It sets forth facts calmly and judiciously, and the only exuberance which it contains is exuberance about scenery which is unsurpassed in the world,—and most of that is quoted from women writers. Those who are booming the country for a second Canadian Northwest will not like the author's summing up of the outlook for agriculture in Alaska: "Agriculture as a whole in Alaska is valuable solely for the purpose of supplying the local market, and that in part only." But it is true. The successful agriculturist in Alaska, present or prospective, is the truck farmer hard by a mining camp where they will pay twenty-five cents a pound for cabbage and forty cents a pound for cauliflower.

Although it might be thought that there was no scope for literary style in such a volume, yet again and again, in his compact and comprehensive sentences, in his very terseness, in his selection of just the right word, there is a weight and what one may call a military dignity of English that give great distinction to this book amongst such books.

HUDSON STUCK.

Fairbanks, Alaska.